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Russians switch Middle East focus to Iraq

RECEIVED IN
REGISTRY No. 10
25 FEB 1972
NEQ 3/303/2

From DAVID HIRST : Beirut, February 24

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257/2

The Soviet Union, uncertain of her future in Egypt, appears to have embarked on a bold, pragmatic, new effort to broaden her influence in the Middle East as a whole. Iraq is now emerging as a new focus of Soviet interest.

Officially all is now well, indeed better than ever, between the Egyptians and the Russians. The Soviet Defence Minister, Marshal Grechko, left Cairo earlier this week amid renewed expressions of mutual regard.

In a joint communiqué, he "expressed satisfaction with the standard of training and fighting efficiency of the Egyptian armed forces." The two sides had exchanged views about "strengthening cooperation to raise Egypt's fighting ability."

At the same time, President Sadat has been hinting strongly that Egypt is getting more deeply involved, on Russia's side, in the super Power rivalry that is intensifying in the Eastern Mediterranean.

"We are now facing an imperialist attempt to involve us in military alliances in the region," he said. The implication is that he is resisting such involvement, but, in view of his amazing facility for saying one thing and doing another, it would be unwise to take his words at face value.

He has also said that his talks in Moscow were a "big success in the formulation of a common understanding of the situation and a common analysis of the meaning of Middle East developments."

By this he appears to mean, among other things, that he shares the Soviet concern at America's acquisition facilities for the Sixth Fleet in Piraeus and her alleged intention of overthrowing Archbishop Makarios in an attempt to extend them to Cyprus.

The paradox, evidently a dangerous one in Russian eyes, is that this relationship, ostensibly closer than ever, seems to be ravaged below the surface by mistrust and personal animosities which are probably worse than ever.

The Soviet Union's warm new relationship with Iraq is a measure of her adaptability. The Russians have found it difficult to hide her disapproval of many Iraqi policies — persecution of local Communists, hostility to Egypt, and opposition to a Middle East peace settlement and Russian-backed efforts to achieve one.

There has as yet been no significant change in Ba'athist attitudes, but apparently the Russians have now decided to overlook them and, it seems, are on the point of entering into a "treaty of friendship"

similar to the one they concluded with Egypt last year.

VISITING Moscow recently, Sidam Hussein Takriti, the Ba'athist strongman, called for a "strategic alliance" with the Soviet Union, and in a joint communiqué the two sides said there would be "additional measures to raise relations between the two countries to a new and higher level that will take a treaty form."

They condemned "imperialist campaigns" aimed at discrediting Iraq abroad—choosing to ignore that it is Iraqi Communists who, with their accounts of Ba'athist atrocities, have furnished much of the material for these campaigns.

The Russians praised the Ba'athists' new national charter, the theoretical basis of a new attempt to collaborate with the Communists and other "progressives" — apparently disregarding the probability, in the light of past experience, that it will remain strictly theoretical.

It would appear that what the Russians like about the Ba'athists is that, disagree with them though they might, they are at least dealing with a strong, secure regime that knows its own mind. If Iraq were to make it up with Egypt, so much the better for Russia: if she doesn't, then they can discreetly use the Ba'athists as

P70

25 FEB 1972



Marshal Grechko

a counterweight to the wayward Egyptians.

As for the Ba'athists, they are adaptable, too. Said one Ba'athist newspaper after the conclusion of the Soviet-Egyptian treaty: "The Arabs are sensitive about the word 'treaty.' They have fought treaties all their lives."

No doubt, Sidam Hussein believes that he is strong enough at home to resist the kind of interference that the Russians have attempted in Egypt, and that, without losing too much of his independence, he can exploit Soviet support to further consolidate his position.

Oil is one of his main concerns. Iraq's interminable dispute with the Iraq Petroleum Company seems to be coming to a head again. In April, the prolific North Rumailah field, expropriated from IPC, is due to go into production. IPC will presumably do what it can to prevent the oil being marketed. The Russians, who helped

develop the field, will probably be called on to take the oil.

Another result of the Soviet Union's new diplomatic offensive in the Arab world is the present visit to Moscow of Major Jallud, the Number Two in Libya's revolutionary leadership. This is a surprising development, coming so soon after Colonel Gadhafi's classification of Russia as an "imperialist" Power.

It is a fair assumption that, here too, oil — the problems of marketing outputs from BP's nationalised oilfields — will figure prominently on the agenda.

The Soviet Deputy Premier, Mr Mazurov, is spending five days in Syria — possibly with another friendship treaty in his briefcase.

And reported criticism of Sudanese Communists by one of Russia's staunchest supporters in the Czech leadership, and the naming of a new Soviet Ambassador to Khartoum could be signs that even in the Sudan the Russians are now ready to let bygones be bygones.

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British Interests
Section
BAGHDAD

3/5

Miss V E Beckett
Near Eastern Department
F C O

26 February 1972

Don't know *Enter*

LIBYA/IRAQ/SOVIET UNION

1. Al Thawra, the Ba'ath Party's newspaper, published an editorial on 25 February in which it referred to what it called Libya's "anxiety" about Iraq/Soviet relations (Tripoli telno 308 to FCO).

2. The editorial asked why the Libyan Government had appointed itself an "umpire" in this matter, and went on to point out that three years ago, the present Libyan rulers were unheard of, which gave them no right to appoint themselves as "a guardian over parties and old-established revolutionary forces such as the ABSP which has been leading the struggle of the Arab masses for liberation, unity and socialism for many years."

com *over*

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British Interests
Section

BAGHDAD

3 March 1972

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Miss V E Beckett
Near Eastern Department
P C O

pnk

LIBYA/IRAQ/SOVIET UNION

1. Al Thawra reverted to the question of Libya's interest in its relations with the Soviet Union (my letter of 26 February) on 3 March. It reported that the Libyan government had stated that President Qaddafi had refused to receive the Iraqi Ambassador in Cairo when he visited Libya recently to explain Iraq's point of view. Al Thawra says that the Ambassador's visit to Libya had been entirely private, and that he had not sought any such audience, pointing out that there was a resident Iraqi Ambassador in Tripoli so that there would have been no need for Nasir al Hadithi to make such a call in any case. ②

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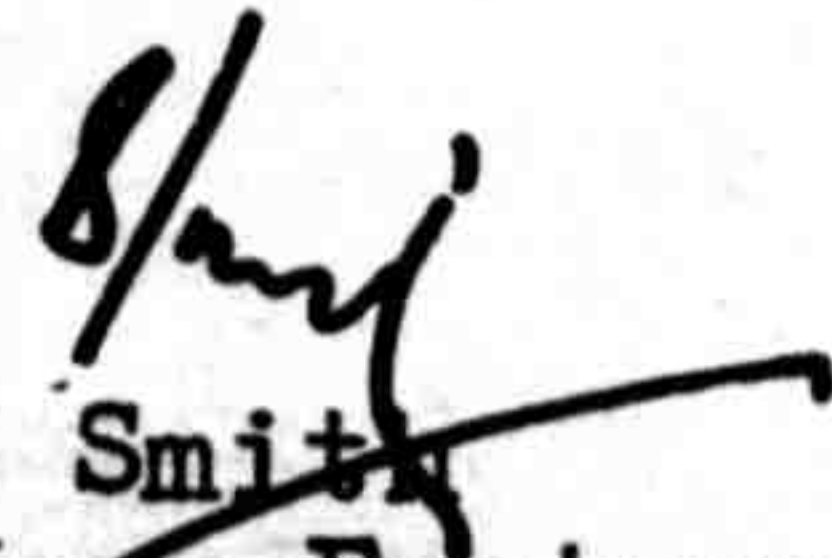
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Mr Welborn

CALL ON THE MINISTER OF STATE BY THE IRANIAN AMBASSADOR, ON
16 MARCH

1. The Iranian Ambassador has said he wishes to raise two subjects, the UAE (for which Arabian Department are preparing a note) and Iraq/USSR relations.
2. I attach a copy of the brief on Soviet Policy in the Middle East, prepared for the Secretary of State's forthcoming visits, which Mr Godber will find useful (particularly paragraph 4) for the Iranian Ambassador's call.


B Smith
Near Eastern Department

15 March 1972

Enc

Copies to : Mr Laver
Mr Evans

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BRIEF NO E3

VISIT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE TO TEHRAN, ISLAMABAD,
TEL AVIV AND ROME

SOVIET POLICIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST, MEDITERRANEAN, INDIAN SUB-
CONTINENT AND THE INDIAN OCEAN.

POINTS TO MAKE

A. The Middle East

1. We may be entering a period of increased Soviet activity in the area (paragraphs 1 and 2).
2. The Russian aim remains that of increasing their influence at the expense of the West. (paragraph 3).

[For Tehran only]

3. The Russians attach importance of their position in Iraq, but we take a less pessimistic view than the Iranians of their ability to influence the Iraqi leaders. (paragraph 4).

B. The Mediterranean

4. The Russians regard recent developments in Cyprus as a threat to its independence. (paragraph 5).
5. They would like to deny the use of Maltese bases to the West (paragraph 6).

C. The Indian Sub-continent

6. The Russians wish to extend their influence, to limit that of the West, and to exclude that of China. They desire good relations with all 3 countries in the area. [For Islamabad only] How did President Bhutto's visit to Moscow go? (paragraphs 7 - 10).

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D. The Indian Ocean

7. The primary purpose of the Soviet naval presence is to extend Soviet influence in the littoral states at the expense of the West, and of China. We wish to co-operate with our friends in measures which will enhance the stability of the area (paragraph 11).

[For Tehran only]

8. The Shah has agreed with a British proposal to hold joint staff talks on the Indian Ocean. The Iranians are now considering an outline agenda. We consider this to be a useful form of co-operation. (paragraphs 12 - 14).

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BRIEF NO E3

SOVIET POLICIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST, MEDITERRANEAN,
INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT AND THE INDIAN OCEAN

A. THE MIDDLE EAST

1. There have recently been numerous exchanges between the Soviet Union and various Arab countries. The Iraqi and Libyan Vice-Presidents have visited Moscow. A delegation led by a Soviet Deputy Prime Minister has gone to Syria. The Soviet Defence Minister has visited Somalia. And on 15 February the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates.
2. The coincidence in the timing of these visits may be fortuitous. But there may now be a period of increased Soviet activities in the area. The Russians, after their setbacks in Egypt and the Sudan, may be anxious to spread their influence more widely both as between and within the countries of the region. As between countries, they may feel that they have previously identified themselves too exclusively with Egypt; and that Egypt is now less effective a base for influence in the Arab world. Within individual countries, they are developing in Iraq and Syria links with the respective wings of the Ba'ath Party similar to those which they established with the Egyptian ASU. They are also committed to study the question of a treaty with Iraq.
3. It is unlikely that these developments represent any major change in Soviet policy towards the Middle East. Rather, the Russians seem to

/be

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are exploiting what they may see as a favourable conjuncture to pursue more vigorously their traditional aims of extending their influence and reducing that of the West.

SOVIET-IRAQI RELATIONS /For use in Tehran only/

4. The Secretary of State may care to point out to the Iranians that we take a rather less pessimistic view than they do of the Soviet involvement in Iraq. We consider that the Russians have grounds for caution in their relations with the Iraqis; they are conscious of the unreliability of the Iraqi leadership, and of their isolation in the Arab world. It is doubtful whether the Russians will be able to establish a lasting basis for influence within the Ba'ath Party, or in building up the position of the Iraq Communist Party. They attach considerable importance to their relations with Egypt and Iran and this will tend to inhibit their support for Iraqi policies. Despite close links in the economic and military fields, the Russians have only limited leverage. An Iraq-Soviet friendship treaty would confirm Soviet interest in the country, but it is unlikely to amount to more than a formalisation of the existing relationship, or to give the Russians any important new openings.

B. THE MEDITERRANEAN

5. The Soviet Union regards itself as a Mediterranean power and maintains a naval presence in the area comparable to that of NATO. Its purpose is to counter-balance the NATO presence, particularly the US Sixth Fleet, to emphasise the Soviet commitment to the Arab side in the Arab/Israel dispute, and to promote Soviet policies generally. In recent weeks the Soviet press has professed increased concern over events in the eastern Mediterranean. It has contended that the recent

/Greek

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Greek pressure on President Makarios is an attempt to subordinate Cyprus to NATO. The Russian Government has also protested to the Greeks and Americans about the proposed arrangements for the home-porting of the US Navy at Piraeus. This has been presented to establish American naval bases in Greece and as a threat to Soviet security.

6. The Russians have doubtless been closely following developments over Malta. It would be very valuable to them to deny the use of the bases to the West, and they would probably see some benefit in acquiring facilities for their own use, providing the terms were right. They have been developing contacts with the Maltese, particularly in the commercial field, but are displaying considerable caution. They may estimate that any precipitate moves could prove counter-productive.

C. THE SUB-CONTINENT: INDIA

7. Throughout Mrs Gandhi's premiership India has moved closer to the Soviet Union and the Indo-Soviet Treaty of August 1971, though signed under the compulsion of the crisis in East Pakistan, set the seal on an existing close relationship. In return for their support, and in particular for their vetoes at the United Nations during the 14-day war, the Soviet Union can be expected to claim some reward in terms of greater influence in India.

8. Soviet aims in the sub-continent are to extend their own influence, to reduce that of the West, and to exclude that of China. They believe that these aims can best be achieved in a reasonably stable situation in which they are able to maintain good relations with all three countries in the sub-continent. Their main concern is with India, but it is too

/early

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Orly to say how successful they will be in pursuing their interests.

As Gandhi has made it clear to us that India has no intention of being subservient to the Soviet Union and, in the context of President Nixon's visit to Peking, she has stated forcefully that India has an independent course to pursue and will not be pushed around by the super powers.

Having removed the military threat from Pakistan and seen the Chinese unwilling to intervene, India may be less in need of a protecting hand and more resistant to Soviet designs.

PAKISTAN

9. Despite the Soviet Union's support for India during the recent war, the Russians will wish to maintain their links with Islamabad. Pakistan remains of concern to the Soviet Union for geographical reasons, and the Russians will not wish to see it wholly dependent upon China, or upon China and the United States. They may well hope to establish a relationship similar to that which they enjoy with Turkey and Iran. President Bhutto is visiting the Soviet Union from 16 - 18 March for talks with the Soviet leaders. The Secretary of State may wish to ask for an account of the visit.

BANGLADESH

10. The Russians no doubt hope to build up their position in the country, and to limit Chinese influence. Sheikh Mujib is not in a strong position to resist Soviet pressure, and the communiqué issued after his recent visit to Moscow contained points which reflect his inexperience in international affairs. However, he does not seem to have made any major concessions. Furthermore, we believe that he is anxious to establish good relations with the West as well as with the Soviet Union.

/D.

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THE INDIAN OCEAN

1. The Soviet Union has since 1968 maintained an almost continuous naval presence in the Indian Ocean, which at times has been the largest of any external power. During and after the recent Indo-Pakistan war there was a marked increase in the Soviet naval presence. The primary purpose of this presence is to extend Soviet influence in the littoral states at the expense of the West, and of China, although it has the capability to pose a threat to Western shipping and oil supplies in times of tension and war. Soviet intentions are unclear, but if they wished to improve this capability, they could do so by the acquisition of more logistic facilities in the area. As Soviet influence increases, it will become more difficult for the developing countries concerned to pursue their own interests. We consider it important to maintain a Western presence in the area in order to deter the Russians from interfering in local political situations at the expense of developing countries. We wish to co-operate with friends and allies in measures that will enhance stability in the Indian Ocean region, but we do not consider that the problems of security there are a matter involving Britain alone. We are continuing to deploy British naval forces and long range maritime reconnaissance aircraft to the Indian Ocean to help maintain a general vigilance in this area.

IRAN AND INDIAN OCEAN SECURITY /For use in Tehran only_7

12. The Shah has showed considerable concern about Soviet activities in the Indian Ocean and has been anxious to engage us in a dialogue on this subject. The Secretary of State sent a personal message to

/the Shah

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The Shah in January (delivered orally) which stated inter alia that fully shared the Shah's views on the importance of maintaining stability in the Indian Ocean area and he would be considering how best we could work together to achieve this. The Ambassador on instructions expanded on the Secretary of State's message by putting to the Shah the suggestion that we and the Iranians might, at appropriate intervals, hold staff talks on planning and operational subjects against the background of any appropriate intelligence available at the time. The Shah was pleased at our response to his concern about developments in the Indian Ocean and said that he would welcome more detailed proposals in due course.

13. At an interview with the Shah on 9 March the Ambassador proposed an outline agenda for the Staff Talks comprising the following items: joint naval exercises, co-ordination of surveillance, naval control of shipping, close air support and mechanised warfare in the 70's. The Shah thought these were useful suggestions though he would wish to consider them further. Our team would be welcome at any time. He would personally brief the Iranian team. He asked the Ambassador to get in touch directly with the Iranian Ministry of Defence and invite their comments on our proposals. The leader of the British team is likely to be the Assistant Chief of Defence Staff (Policy) - Major General Fraser. Because of other commitments we have tentatively scheduled the talks for 22-24 November (though this date has not yet been disclosed to the Iranians).

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CALL BY THE IRANIAN AMBASSADOR ON THE MINISTER OF STATE ON
16 MARCH AT 12 NOON

BACKGROUND NOTE

THE UAE

1. We are moderately optimistic about the prospects for the UAE. Although it has made a slow start and the necessary machinery of Government is inadequate, the two key figures, Shaikhs Zaid and Rashid, still appear determined to make the Union work. This should remain the aim of all concerned, in the interests of stability.
2. We regret the UAE's decision to exchange diplomatic missions with the Soviet Union. This was primarily an Abu Dhabi decision but consultation did take place with Shaikh Rashid and the other Rulers. We hope the UAE authorities will ensure that the number of Soviet diplomats in the UAE is kept to an absolute minimum. This seems to be Zaid's present intention, and the rumour that Soviet consulates are to be set up in the other states of the Union has been denied by the UAE authorities.

SHAIKH ZAID'S VISITS TO LIBYA AND SYRIA

3. We took strong exception to the terms of the communique which was issued following Shaikh Zaid's departure from Libya. (Text attached).
4. We accordingly instructed HM Ambassador at Abu Dhabi to protest to the President (FCO telegram number 62 to Doha), pointing out that the intemperate language used in the communique about the Islands could only serve to exacerbate tensions in the Gulf. Shaikh Zaid replied (Abu Dhabi telegram No. 153) that, thanks to the efforts of Ahmed Suwaidi, the communiqué had in fact been much milder than the first draft, which had proposed military action by the Arabs to reoccupy the Islands. The President also claimed that he had spoken privately to Qaddafi about the need for UAE/Iranian friendship and cooperation.
5. The communiqué following the Syrian visit (text attached) was, on the whole, less objectionable, apart from the unfortunate reference to "the three Gulf Islands". We had not seen the text of this communiqué when HM Ambassador at Abu Dhabi made his protest to Shaikh

/Zaid

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Zaid and we have not, therefore, questioned the President about this particular reference. He would probably claim that he had not authorised specific reference to "3" Islands.

5. We conclude that Shaikh Zaid found it much more difficult than he had anticipated to resist the pressures in Tripoli and Damascus. It is certainly very unfortunate that he put his name on behalf of the UAE to those two communiqués. We hope he will now have the good sense to lie low and to resist any attempt by the Libyans to launch further initiatives aimed at reopening the Islands question. The Arab League for its part seems content to leave things at the moment to King Faisal and the diplomatic channel.

OTHER MATTERS

6. If Mr Afshar asks about the situation in Qatar, the Minister of State might say that everything now appears to be back to normal. The deposed Ruler and his son are still in Dubai but we hope that the UAE will not allow the marriage tie between the deposed Ruler and the Ruler of Dubai to stand in the way of good relations between the UAE and Qatar. There seems to be a fair prospect that the UAE authorities will eventually be able to negotiate a settlement between the new Ruler and his deposed cousin. Meanwhile the Government in Qatar is likely to function more effectively.

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Minister

Sp record in/omg
kln. sent to
Mervin.

m. Smith
N.E.I.)

The S. of State (4)

should see a note of
this meeting before he goes
to Tehran. J.G. 16/3

The Iranian Ambassador has said
that he wishes to raise two
subjects. They are:

- a) The UAE, and
- b) Iraq/USSR Relations



2. A copy of the brief on Soviet Policy
in the Middle East, prepared for the Sifs;
forthcoming visits, is at Flag F. You
will find para 4, which deals with Soviet
Iraqi Relations, useful for this call.

PLW 16/3.

LAST PAPER

Covering ~~SECRET~~

Minister of State
(Mr Acland will
attend the meeting)

Mr Renwick

MR AFSHAR'S CALL ON THE MINISTER OF STATE ON THURSDAY, 16 MARCH
AT 12 NOON

--- 1. I attach a background note for use by Mr Godber at this
meeting.

FLAG E 2. I also attach a PRIPER telegram (Tehran No. 231) which
4/1. gives further background on the Shah's present attitude.

A A Acland

A A Acland
Arabian Department

15 March, 1972

cc Mr Parsons

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